

Wednesday, April 20, 2005

STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE ENZI - EARLY EDUCATION
& CARE: WHAT IS FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S ROLE?

"I want to thank Senator Alexander for calling this Subcommittee hearing to address the role of the federal government in our early childhood education programs. I also appreciate our witnesses taking the time out of their very busy schedules to be with us.

Today's hearing will give us a chance to focus on early education programs with two questions in mind. First of all, are early education programs effective and do they play an important role in our goal of providing all our citizens with access to a lifetime of learning? Secondly, if these programs are effective, how can we best use our resources to make them available to more of our children, especially in rural areas where the delivery of these services has been hampered by problems with geography, personnel and resources.

Earlier this week a report was released that cited a study that started 40 years ago. It took a close look at the economic impact of good preschooling on children determined to be at risk. Although limited in scope, the study found that the group that received a quality education was more likely to complete school, they had better jobs, they were making higher incomes, they were more likely to own their own homes, and they were less likely to be on welfare or to have turned to crime.

Those are the kind of statistics that get our attention – especially the estimate that every dollar invested in early education programs saved taxpayers as much as \$13 later on in public education, criminal justice and welfare costs.

We shouldn't be surprised. There's an old saying, it's not where you start, it's where you finish. In today's world, with today's educational opportunities, we are finding the opposite is true. More often than not where you start determines where you finish and those who get off to a good start have dramatically better finishes than those who do not get that same break at the beginning.

Fortunately, the importance of a good education is a lesson that was learned a long time ago and the federal government has been doing its best over the past years to increase access to these vital programs. From a handful of programs that were begun during the War on Poverty in the 1960's that commitment has grown to more than 60 such programs around the country. Many of these programs serve similar populations of young children. Programs like Head Start, the Child Care Development Block Grant, and many others authorized through No Child Left Behind, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and numerous others, are providing Federal support for States or local communities to provide services for children.

Congress has an interest in ensuring that these programs are working together, so that our children will receive the services they need and are eligible to receive. We should also be

looking at ways we can improve the collaboration between Federal, State, and local programs, so more children can begin the learning process early, and enter school ready and fully prepared to learn.

Many of these programs appear to overlap, and many states and local communities are struggling with running similar programs with different requirements. Several of these programs are operated by different Federal Departments and the funds are delivered to different state agencies. In some cases, Federal funds are provided directly to local grantees without any state involvement.

This inconsistent approach to early childhood education has created a number of challenges that may be preventing states and local agencies from helping students more effectively. The Federal government is asking different entities receiving Federal funds to operate each of these programs slightly differently, frequently without any form of collaborative arrangement.

It is my hope that today's hearing will help provide a foundation for stronger collaboration between these programs, so our children can get the best start possible and Federal dollars can be used most effectively. I look forward to today's testimony and the discussion that will follow."